THE PHILOSOPHER OF HISTORY AND THE MODERN STATESMAN[1]

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How to confront the two, the philosopher of history and the modern statesman? In actual life the philosopher of history and the statesman are not too willing to listen to each other—now less than ever, as ours is a time in which action tends to be thoughtless and thought inactive. Furthermore, we use both terms in a loose and flickering sense. Hence both the philosopher of history and the statesman are ambiguous animals.

Since it is dubious both what they are and should be, I shall take the liberty of a somewhat queer procedure. I shall first eliminate step by step a few types of both philosophers and statesmen—those who have nothing to say or had better not listen to each other—thus working my way upward to the real statesman and the real philosopher of history, intent on showing that they alone will be desirous and capable of listening to each other. They alone will have something worth while to say to each other, and thus by this very desire, capacity and worth may define each other mutually as the true philosopher and the real statesman.

The first I discard is the methodologist of scientific historiography whom many call nowadays philosopher of history, philosophy being nothing but the epistemology of science. This elimination raises no problem. He is a modest fellow and does not claim to be listened to by any statesman.

The second I discard is the politician proper. He is not quite so modest, though he has little to say to which any philosopher would listen, or should listen. I will try to identify him in a few words.

He is the puppet of history, not its maker except by default or

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accident. He merely plays a well known game, maneuvering from one short-lived smartness to the next, swimming now with this now with that current, to come to or to remain in power. He may be smart and yet equally stupid. If he is entrusted with the task of the statesman and called upon to shape the future of a nation he usually finds himself, after a time of clever maneuvering, caught or hopelessly entangled in the consequences of his own actions; even in the case of glamorous successes he may end up with the opposite of the aim which he or his nation intended to pursue, or of the principles he proclaimed. His foreign policy will be a manipulation of domestically expedient slogans, stereotypes and emotions. Nations whose political leaders compete in that kind of smartness will inevitably land together in a situation where forces that can be unleashed, but once released no longer controlled, lead, blindly interacting, from war to war into deeper and deeper misery.

This kind of politician I discard; he may claim to be but he is not the statesman. But since the statesman cannot come to or remain in power without being also a clever politician, the skilful politician, after some success on perishable paper, poses as statesman.

The next I must discard is a type of philosopher of history properly to be called the metaphysician of history. He is as arrogant as the methodologist is humble. He claims to be the only one to whom the statesman should listen. Thus he is not so quickly discarded. His concern is with the meaning of the historical process as extended in time. He interprets universal history as unity of a plot. He fancies that he knows its meaning. He pretends to be able to declare it; he usurps the throne of God and behaves as a divine observer outside history. Though his respect for evidence is but small, he can be a forceful mind of great speculative power and he may lay his hands on the thought of a century.

Though the great representatives of this philosophy of history belong to the nineteenth century, the modern statesman will meet

his power in the mind of contemporary man. The historian may spurn his speculative constructions, history itself may refute him—yet these constructions are a response to a longing, deeply rooted in the uneasy soul of modern man.

Man, the ephemeral being, craves to think of the sweat and sorrow of his few days as imbedded in a process that carries the past into the future upwards toward a goal of ultimate meaning—by an inherent necessity. As the power of religion fades and (in the mass society of our own days) God and Providence evaporate behind a thin veil of words, the metaphysician of history fills a void: his constructions of the historical process become the raw material of the secularized religions we call ideologies. Most of these modern ideologies are pseudo-scientific interpretations of universal history; man sees his present as a link in a chain of a benevolent destiny which leads humanity, or at least his own nation as the chosen representative of humanity, toward some ultimate promise. The arrogance of a pretended knowledge is called upon to replace the humble reference to an inscrutable will. And yet it can never play its role in the soul of man—for two reasons: first, providence known is no longer providence; second, the goodness and badness of man's actions become functional—they depend on the pretended future, to which they are thought to lead. The immediate relation of each moment to a god, the direct reference to an eternal judge, is discarded.

Despite these differences the ideology, like religion, is hope and belief; it protects, consoles, strengthens endurance and becomes a historical force of first magnitude and an instrument of power. Industrial man has conquered nature. She is no longer the power on which everyone's destiny hinges. This power is society. Society, however, is manmade. The same man who patiently bends to nature will not be so patient if, in an industrial society whose complexity he cannot grasp, he is to endure manmade poverty in a nature of potential plenty. Thus an ultimate promise and a law of history are called upon by victorious revolutions to delay the outbreak of man's impatience and thus to decrease the

necessary amount, and to facilitate the task, of naked coercion by a secret police.

The modern statesman meets the power of such ideologies in many and complex ways—on the domestic scene, in the international field and maybe in his own soul. The original philosophies of history of great speculative minds have undergone a thorough change. The modern simplifiers and manipulators of mass movements have shaped and reshaped highly sophisticated theoretical bodies into systems of magic formulas of dubious meanings, to be waved as flags fitting the political purpose of the revolutionary movements. The philosopher of history himself would hardly recognize his original thought in the final product. Hegel would certainly scorn and spurn Marx, Marx the philosopher might even repudiate Marx the revolutionary leader, and each of the two Marxes might object to Lenin and Lenin to Stalin. History, however, cares but little; it shoves aside the real Hegel and the real Marx, without pity or respect, and upholds Stalin for a while at the top of the world.

In this process of simplification thought and action strangely intermingle. The revolutionary leader who forges an expedient instrument of power is usually the first victim of his own propaganda. Most propagandists are. To be efficient they indoctrinate first themselves. Even our propagandists do—and do not notice it.

The modern statesman of a still free society, trusting the power of reasonable discourse based on evidence, wonders at the tenacity of these mere constructions—even when they are not supported, as in the totalitarian states, by a joint monopoly of propaganda, violence and modern technology. Reasons and historical evidence to the contrary matter but little. Most of these constructions provide means and devices that can be used for explaining away any such evidence.

One of these devices is the "cunning of reason"—that *List der Vernunft* which accounts for all aberrations, detours or roundabout ways that the Weltgeist chooses to use; even the atomic

bomb can be interpreted as *List der Vernunft.* In our own days the *List der Vernunft* has been replaced by the "period of transition." Though toiling humanity has lived since Adam's fall in a perpetual "period of transition" there appear, in the dubious constructions of the metaphysician of history, special periods of transition, connecting the phases in which the universal process is articulated. These transition periods are called upon to justify whatever acts, devices and policies do not fit the scheme. These were "the inevitable measures of transition" of the late Bucharin—until he himself fell victim to such an "inevitable measure." There is the secret police of the total state, which leads the bourgeois society into the stateless and policeless society of the future. The period of transition, an expedient excuse, both moral and intellectual, justifies the means and delays the promises; thus the revolutionary leader, unable to renounce those means or to fulfil those promises, goes on forever acting in a period of transition.

While the modern statesman in a still free society meets the power of a bygone philosophy of history in the ideologies of revolutionary movements and totalitarian states, he meets at home —in the most peaceful and complacent parts of his own society— another philosophy of history or its remnants, less visible, less noisy, but by no means less dangerous. It is but a specific kind of the philosophy of progress—the belief in an automatic progress as a law of the historical process as such, brought about not by man's actions and intentions but by a law of evolution—that "superficial notion" which in the words of T. S. Eliot "becomes in the popular mind a means of disowning the past." It leads to the strange but cheerful assumption that things after all cannot go wrong fundamentally and ultimately.

This mostly half-conscious assumption cuts across the usual division of "reactionaries" and "progressives." It can be made by both. Disturbances are discarded as short-range events. It is taken for granted that the long-range trend is progressive. This belief may no longer be, or deserve the honorable name of, a

philosophy of history. It too has long ago forgotten its respectable ancestors and their arguments. What remains is hardly more than a broad generalization assuming that man's increasing power over nature implies an increasing power of reason over man—a wrong conclusion contradicted by more and more evidence, yet suggested by wishful thinking and subconsciously supported by the weight of economic theory in which, according to Adam Smith, "man is led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention." In an era and society to which economic life seemed to be the whole of life, the notion of a self-regulating process of the market under the ideal case of perfect competition was subconsciously generalized and transferred to the political process. It fitted and supported the smugness that takes the future of the society for granted, even if not part of any intentions, and served as excuse and mental background to that cheerful ease in which the ever smiling politician plays the political game this or that way, enjoying his smartness and entrusting the final outcome to an inherent law of progress.

I finally dismiss the metaphysician of history—despite his pretension. Though his relations to the statesman in concrete history are manifold and complex, he is not the kind of philosopher who deserves to be listened to by the real statesman. After all, philosophy is or should be concerned with reality and not with mere constructions, however lofty. I turn to the real philosopher of history, who is not a metaphysician of history, and to the real statesman, who is not a mere politician. But who are they? Where do they meet?

The statesman acts. He cannot escape deciding—he must either release or not release the atomic bomb. Even at its best his knowledge of the factors and forces working in the field is limited. Any decision opens one door and shuts another. Some of his decisions decide the future of his nation one way or the other. He acts. The deed once done cannot be undone. He cannot take it back. The bomb is released. The actions of others, the concatenation of events, probable or improbable, never entirely fore-

seen or foreseeable, take a hand, whirl his actions around and play with their consequences a cruel or benevolent game.

This is the fundamental situation of the acting man—here history is concrete. This situation, not the meaning of a universal process, constitutes history as history. It is its flesh and blood. In this situation, submitting to its inherent persuasive force, the statesman has a natural philosophy of history of his own. He may not be aware of it; he may rationalize it in terms of whatever philosophy he happens to have inherited, and in doing this he may be utterly inconsistent. The fundamental situation of acting as acting sways his heart, whatever his words may be. In this natural philosophy he looks at the future as not only unknown but still undecided. Much is pre-decided by the forces and factors working in the field—but they only limit the frame of action. Possibilities though limited are still open, even for the improbable. Their range is now wider, now narrower. There are moments when their range seems to narrow to zero and necessity sways the hour—such moments pass, the future is wide open again. The distribution of probabilities, their numerical values, change. This distribution is twofold—in the reality itself and in relation to his restricted knowledge.

At any rate, the present as the moment of decision separates a past that is decided from a future yet undecided—thus defining past and future as different modes of Being. This present, the moment of decision, marches on—mercilessly, without rest or respite, and carries with it and changes the wavering shadows which a waning memory throws on dimly glowing expectations. However great the impact of the past on the future, the future is still open; it is to be decided. A strong willed wisdom, grasping in a synoptic view the totality, the dynamic assessment of all the factors, can decide it—in coherent action from step to step, carefully refraining from unleashing those sinister social chain reactions in which the interplay of blind forces gets out of hand. The future has not yet any meaning derived from the historical process as a whole. Man—the present man—gives the

meaning or fails to give the meaning: in the happiness or misery of man.

This is the natural philosophy of history of the acting statesman, as he is called upon not to interpret history but to make it. To this natural philosophy even the totalitarian statesman adheres in his heart, whatever the metaphysics of history that his lips profess. I stress this point: it may be that the "scientific" interpreter of history would do better to change his post of observation and exchange the usurped throne of an observer outside history for the soul of man inside history, lest the flesh and blood of life escape his eyes.

Now the real statesman and the politician part company. While the politician merrily plays his game from one short-lived smartness to another, trusting that he will find a way out of every mess in which he gets entangled, the real statesman is not allowed to be, like ordinary man, a short-range planner and a long-range dreamer. He is bent on shaping the future. He does not take it for granted. If he fails—there may be no future for his nation, or, under present conditions, even for mankind. He knows his ends, he has a goal, a hierarchy of purposes, long-term and short-term; he subordinates one to the other; he has a vision of both the possible and the desirable and looks at the one under the aspect of the other; he thinks the possibilities through to their end; he follows up his actions, keeping ready a possible answer for whatever their foreseeable consequence—trying to keep his hand on the events and their interaction, flexible at short range, rigid at long range, passionately reasonable, a knower of human nature, suspicious even of his own love and hate and of the many passions that blind the children of man. His eyes are cold and hard yet the flame burns in his heart as he opposes his specific virtue to the play that necessity and chance play with each other.

Who is, of what kind is, the philosopher of history to whom this statesman should listen? First it is he who listens to the statesman. He takes into account the fundamental situation of the acting statesman, which after all is only the situation of man,

the finite being, writ large in the capital letters of history. He does not construct the unity of a plot or presuppose meanings to be derived from an ultimate end of a process in time. His meaning is here, present at any moment, in the happiness of miserable man, in the excellence of the peace we enjoy, in the deeds we do, the laws we give, the songs we sing, forever precarious. He worries as little as any man in action about the famous problem of freedom and determination; it is the problem of whether relatively to an all-knowing observer outside history the future is determined by a finite number of parameters which obey rules that have the mathematical form of linear differential equations of the second order—the specific system of determination which, applied to the succession of events in time, we call, or alone should call, "causality." History is what it is to man, and man's possible knowledge is limited. His problem is the inner structure of history, its "logos," the eternal interplay of its forces and factors as man, moving in a space that moves, acting and being acted on, carries the past into the future. As this philosopher of history is willing to listen to the statesman, the statesman will be willing to listen to him, as he surveys the enormous spectacle that history unfolds in space and time. Here man, the finite being, potentially the best of all animals and by far the worst, the history-made maker of history, in one its creator, its creatum, and its creandum, wrestles to give history a meaning, succeeds and fails. God is guiltless—the guilt is man's.

The play of births and deaths reaches from a half forgotten past through a confused present into an unknown future. Actualities emerge from the sea of possibilities, change and sink. Societies, tribes, cities, realms, empires, nations strive and wane. Worlds in the world grow and decay. The gentle graciousness, the moans of sorrow, the shining deed, the dark misery, the smile of love—together they rise and fade away. The past curbs the future and releases it, begets and strangles it. Bodies of half completed worlds emerge and disappear. Many are choked in their youth, others dry up and ossify. Piles of debris cover the bones—only a

few remain visible in the pale light of the historian. Thus this philosopher opposes to the metaphysician of history another picture, a pitiless one it may be, but one that at least is not in any moment contradicted by history itself, and is even able to stand the test of the atomic bomb without resorting to the cunning of reason.

It is a strange play; there is no audience. The actors themselves are its sole observers. No actor, not even a community of actors, stays through the play from beginning to end. Even any hero drops out after hardly more than half a scene. Most of us are poor actors, playing merely ourselves. There are no rehearsals, no script. We do not know our lines, though we have only a few to say. We must be satisfied if the two lines we improvise make sense to ourselves or to our nearest co-actors for some time or seem worth being remembered. It may not be a play at all, as it lacks the unity of a plot. If there is to be a meaning, the actors must provide it during the play. This is the core of their acting. Yet man, unable to do so or slighting this humble meaning, poses as a divine observer outside the play. The metaphysician of history pretends that every scene is what it is by virtue of its role in the play as a whole, whose meaning he knows and is going to proclaim. But any such interpretation of the plot as a whole and its meaning—the philosopher's insistence that there must be such a meaning of the whole which justifies the parts—is itself a product of history; the interpreter of history shapes his interpretation to fit the more or less ephemeral lines he wants to say.

This is a cruel picture. It does not, however, deprive history of meaning. It merely charges man with giving the meaning—to the present with respect to a foreseeable future. Thus it puts the statesman or the collective statesmanship of a nation before its ultimate task.

I come to the end. I return to the situation in which history as history is concrete—the situation of the acting man. It may be that the real statesman needs, though not any metaphysician

of history, another kind of philosopher or his equivalent in his own soul—the knower of "the good" that guides his notion of the desirable and directs his quest for the right and wrong of his ends.

You find in some writings of a great man of ill repute—Machiavelli, who was not merely the technician of force we scorn—an occasional reference to the powers which jointly and in interaction dominate the situation of man. He calls them necessità, fortuna and virtù—necessity, luck and virtue, though the latter word has not quite the connotations of our time. It has a more manly sense. Machiavelli follows an ancient tradition; the three in Greek are Ananke, Tyche and Arete. We can formulate this specific virtue in terms of the ways in which the real statesman handles the two others and their interplay—how he recognizes, endures, stands, evades, slips by, or uses the power of necessità, how he gives fortuna a chance to help and no chance to thwart him, eagerly seizes its favor and firmly stands through its malignity. A description in these terms, however, though it may go pretty far, remains defective. This virtù may still be mere efficiency for power's sake.

But there is, obviously dependent on the same ancient tradition, another list of these "powers" that sway the destiny of man. Goethe, in a poem called "Urworte, orphisch," lists five, not three. Besides Ananke and Tyche appear—instead of Arete—Daimon, Eros, Elpis: the inner demon in man's soul, love and hope. It is again not quite our meaning of love; it is nearer to Plato's Eros, the drive toward that idea of the good which is the ultimate source of all meanings. Now only can I complete the specific virtù of the real statesman. This virtù, if defined as the capacity of wrestling with necessità and fortuna, would be blind though efficient; on the other side, it would be a mere dreaming and a powerless pity were it to be defined as the possession of mere love and hope, however sublime. This specfic virtù of the statesman embraces both pairs; it refers the one to the other, end to means, knowledge to action, the desirable to the possible.

Thus the ideal statesman strains himself to compel the play of necessity and chance to carry love and hope into the reality of a future.

Even the real statesman, however, may not succeed. Success is no reliable criterion. History is harder. The power of necessità and fortuna may be enough to crush the greatest skill of the greatest love.

Let me end with a quick glance at the particular situation of the modern statesman. My picture of the real statesman may seem unreal, beyond the frailty of man. It is an ideal. The ideal measures the performance. It is not arbitrary, however. It is what the logos of action in history requires. Since this ideal claims to be universal I did and could not formulate it in terms of any particular conditions such as ours. In the industrial society of our own age many seem to think of the historical process as nothing but the interaction of all social, economic, political, technological "trends." We make ample though rather loose use of this term. We believe in, rely upon, and like to comply with "trends." If, however, we condescend to take the soul of man as our post of observation we cannot help rediscovering behind and within these trends the living reality of action and decision. These trends drown in their averages the single action of any one of the many millions, and even the range of their divergences. To the statesman, who must make decisions, these trends are but material for recognizing, or guessing at, the element of necessità in the forces and factors whose interplay these trends reveal or conceal. To him those five eternal powers still stand—necessità is not alone. Many a belief in a trend is but a convenient excuse. Some of the most sinister trends of the past or coming decades are but the consequences of the blindness and stupidity of past actions and decisions. We shrug our shoulders and point to a trend. Yet the guilt is still man's.

I admit, however, that there are times in which the situation goes far beyond what any single man can do. If there was ever such a time it is ours. No single man can live up to the ideal

picture of the statesman unless supported by the statesmanship of a whole nation. Look at the present scene: the aftermath of a total war, a half devastated world; shattered, dislocated or confused are minds, souls and bodies, the moral standards of both victors and vanquished, traditions, loyalties, hopes, ideas and interests; blind passions, held down but by hunger; a thick fog of old and new lies—this is the situation in which humanity gropes its way along the abyss of its technological advance, frightened yet still dreaming. But even this situation has not pre-decided the future. Man—in this case the equivalent of the statesman or the politician in the nation as a whole and thus in each of us in particular—man himself will decide it.